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Healthcare Innovations Program (HIP) Award and Virtual Presentation Exhibit

Improving Population Health: Using Social Media to Inform, Inspire and Engage Patients Across the Military Health System

Introduction

The mission of the Air Force Medical Service (AFMS) is to provide quality, world-class health care support to beneficiaries worldwide. This includes approximately two million individuals at 75 Military Treatment Facilities (MTFs) leading to the mantra, “Trusted Care, Anywhere.” The challenge with such a dispersed and diverse network is communicating key messages to the audience - patients, families, providers, and beneficiaries, while reflecting the overall AFMS brand.

To meet this challenge, AFMS needed to spark an internal culture shift, as its target audience was turning to new communication channels. This change was in line with recent studies such as the 2011 Pew report, “The Social Life of Health Information,” which found, of the 74 percent of adults who use the Internet, 80 percent have looked online for information about health. This translates to 59 percent of all adults. AFMS went where the audience was by developing a purposeful, responsive, and effective social media outreach initiative to communicate with its audience. Facebook was chosen due to its popularity, sustainability, low cost, and user friendly capabilities, and was considered part of larger AFMS wide electronic health initiatives.

Facebook topped the National Research Corporation’s February 2011 Ticker survey list with 94 percent of respondents indicating its use as a social source of health information. The most recent “Where Airmen Get Information” report indicates that Facebook is the main social media tool that Airmen use for information. Considering this research, AFMS developed a Facebook community as well as 75 local communities, managed by MTFs. By November 2010, awareness of AFMS themes and messages was underway.

Seven content categories were developed to align with the AFMS quadruple aim (Readiness, Better Health, Better Care, Best Value): AFMS Key Messaging, Center of Excellence for Medical Multimedia (CEMM) Content, Conference/Event Info, General Info, Health Info, MHS Theme Content, and Multimedia content (podcast, videos, photos, etc.). A variety of products were developed with the goal of improving population health and awareness with the quad aim in mind.

To measure success and establish a base metric, several tools were used: Facebook Insights, Total Impressions, Facebook Fans, Website Traffic, and Page Tracking. The data provided information which administrators used to make content adjustments, as well as prove the success of using Facebook to communicate with the AFMS audience.

To showcase Military Health Service (MHS) innovations from both direct and purchased care systems in support of the MHS Strategic Plan, AFMS successfully linked patients to information and resources to improve their health. Quantitative analysis of the Facebook page showed that

with proper social tools and strategic planning, AFMS has been able to successfully communicate with a geographically dispersed audience. Facebook metrics show that the audience is extremely receptive, has a desire to engage in their health, and continues to grow in numbers. The targeted content has improved health literacy across the AFMS. To date there are 56 MTFs on Facebook, 16,000 collective Fans, more than one million post views, and an overall interest in the AFMS by the general public.

Methods

To be true to the mantra, “Trusted Care, Anywhere,” a strategic social media approach needed to focus on where the audience enjoyed spending time online and AFMS needed to join and communicate with the audience in that atmosphere, all while being mindful of associated costs. AFMS also had to overcome not only HIPAA challenges but also OPSEC concerns inherent to any military medical organization.

A cohesive social media strategy, including all 75 MTFs, was initiated using Facebook as the primary outlet due to its popularity among the U.S. Air Force (USAF) community (the official USAF Facebook page has roughly 585,000 fans). AFMS senior leadership and early social media adopters were brought together via focus groups to discuss concerns, such as manpower, appropriate content, HIPAA/privacy, OPSEC, and outreach/marketing. Senior leaders, public affairs officers, and executive staff members supported the strategy and created a Strategic Communications Work Group (SCWG). The SCWG provided guidance for everything from the development of Facebook templates to how to develop localized pages that communicated consistent AFMS messaging.

The SMWG also worked to develop an AFMS Social Media Strategy, Policy and Implementation Plan with a supporting “how to” Social Media Toolkit. The goals and objectives for the implementation plan included:

- Build and implement an AFMS social media strategy to help patients, families, providers, and beneficiaries learn about healthy behaviors and the benefits of the AFMS and its medical groups.
- Design, develop, and deliver products that include adaptable toolkit collateral items for MTFs to use while establishing a Facebook page.
- Educate Airmen on social media best practices through Facebook training sessions and working groups.
- Provide cohesive and consistent branding, messaging, identity guidelines, and support in establishing AFMS and MTF’s Facebook pages.
- Provide outreach materials to grow the AFMS fan base and create a “virtual neighborhood” to improve population health.
- Develop metrics to measure adoption, integration, and knowledge through social media networks.
- Monitor and provide support to MTF social media adopters all while sharing success stories and best practices through the SCWG.

AFMS had to lead by example and open its Facebook Page for engagement. To overcome any hesitation, training and resources were provided to Airmen to help them understand social media myths vs. facts mostly surrounding time required, security, and monitoring fans. To date, nearly

600 Airmen throughout the MTFs have been trained on the safe and effective use of social media, with all Facebook Page administrators encouraged to take a Facebook 101 training course. Ongoing support and training continues to be available through a monthly Social Media Working Group and the Social Media Playbook, which includes:

- More than 40 tools, templates, and ready to use materials
- More than 200 Facebook Posts that feature content on Quality and Patient Safety, Resiliency and Suicide Prevention, Patient Centered Medical Home, diabetes, cancer prevention, asthma, pain management, dental health, and heart health
- A monthly content calendar with pre-approved content that aligns to national health themes and AF-wide communication strategies
- Briefing materials on @ tagging, Facebook Insights, discussions, twitter, groups, customized tabs, crisis communications, SlideShare, content development, patient engagement, professional development, customer service, and best practices

To measure success, AFMS focused on several tools such as: “Facebook Insights,” which tracks the growth of the main AFMS page and reports numbers and demographics; “Total Impressions,” which measures the total number of times users view specific posts on the main AFMS page; “Facebook Fans,” which shows the number of people (fans) that establish themselves as users of the AFMS Facebook page; “Website Traffic,” which reports the number of people that click on posted links; “Page Tracking,” which captures the total number of local MTF Facebook pages developed and measures each page against various levels of engagement.

The AFMS team developed an analytical process to capture metrics from both Facebook Insights and manual searches. The team also considered the impact of social media on other MHS metrics including Health care Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS). For example, AFMS developed content to focus on low HEDIS measures at MTFs. During Immunization Awareness month, Facebook content focused on encouraging Well-Child Visits to improve this HEDIS measure across low-scoring MTFs.

The team consolidated and reported metrics on quarterly basis. Sources of data included the 75 MTFs and the nearly 4,000 Facebook Fans. During the official launch, success meant gaining 500 fans within the first month of launching, however, the site garnered 524 fans in the first 24 hours alone. By using Facebook AFMS created a transparent and beneficial relationship with its audience and AFMS leadership understood the importance of the cohesive training and social media strategy.

Results

AFMS recognized great successes with the use of Facebook, specifically in connecting more than 16,000 beneficiaries with their local MTFs. This success is measured by several factors: AFMS has grown from 1,909 Fans in mid-June to 3,741 Fans as of October 29 – a 96 percent increase. A total of 442 Facebook posts have been shared with more than one million views since the launch of the Page – engaging the audience and impacting population health. With these numbers AFMS is considered competitive on Facebook and already has more Fans than U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, JTF CapMed, and US Army Public Health, and Army Medicine, all of which are active Facebook Pages.

Key descriptive statistics include:

- 75 percent (56 out of 75) AFMS MTFs use Facebook
- 77 percent of the MTFs that use Facebook are at the basic level, 11 percent are at advanced, and three percent are at awesome
- 38 percent of all content posted was focused specifically information to improve population health

Population health was the driving factor in implementing social media. The following show how MTFs are reaching out to the local AF population:

- USAF Hospital Langley was able to promote flu shots via their Page. They had a record number of people receive flu shots as a result
- Misawa – 35th Medical Group was able to communicate important news and updates during the 2011 earthquake in Japan
- Vandenberg – 30th Medical Group used Facebook to communicate operational hours during tsunami warnings – keeping their Fan Base informed and up to date
- Scott AFB Clinic saves time by responding to Fans questions via Facebook and posting materials that address FAQs

As AFMS continues to grow its fan base, it has initiated the development of marketing and outreach strategies to create virtual medical neighborhoods to acquire, deliver, and share relevant information via functional groups. Examples of these functional groups are Global Health Engagement, Health and Wellness Centers, Dental, Medical Corps, Nursing Corps, Occupational Therapy, and Psychological Therapy.

The success of using social media within AFMS to reach the larger health population has garnered the attention of partner organizations, which have also posted AFMS information. The top five are:

1. United States Air Force – 580,679 Fans
2. TRICARE – 20,541 Fans
3. Military Health – 6,296 Fans
4. Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) – 5,713 Fans
5. Afterdeployment.org – 1,397

Ongoing data reporting helped AFMS evaluate and improve its Facebook Page. It informed AFMS of the demographics of the audience, helping to determine what health information is most important to the population. The robust resources allowed MTFs to easily adjust their content to meet their audience's information needs.

Conclusion

The initiative to establish a social media presence for AFMS and all MTFs has proven to be a successful and easily sustainable initiative. It can be considered a blue print for DOD wide military health systems allowing the sharing of best practices and ultimately reaching more beneficiaries across the military community.

The ability to replicate this initiative with other health care services has already been proven by the many functional groups that have established or expressed interest in developing a Facebook Page. Such groups are using the resources from the AFMS Social Media Toolkit to move forward with initiatives. Others in the military health space can also adopt the overarching strategy and tools and leverage the success of AFMS as a proven reason to move forward with social media.

Finally, this innovative approach conveys AFMS' dedication to continually adapt to the ever evolving social media environment to convey messages, share information with the community, and communicate in a two-way dialog. In the long term, these innovations will improve patients' quality and access to care, increase satisfaction of patients and staff, and improve population health by empowering patients to play an active role in their health care.